

ON TRACK WITH MDT SEPTEMBER 2003

It's hard to believe that summer is drawing to a close and thousands of children are heading back to school. I feel this a good time to review the following back-to-school safety tips from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and ask you to share them with your family. Doing so could very well save the life of someone you love.

Tips for Students

- ?? Always buckle up when you're riding in a car: it could make the difference between life and death. According to NHTSA's *State Traffic Safety Information for Year 2001* report, available online at <http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/stsi>, there were 230 fatalities in motor vehicle crashes in Montana in 2001, 192 of whom were occupants in passenger vehicles. Of those 192 occupants, 133, or 69.2%, were not properly restrained. NHTSA estimates that 118 of the 133 who were not properly restrained were "savable at 100%."
- ?? Always ride in the back seat. It's the safest place for young people.
- ?? Always wear a helmet and follow traffic safety rules when riding your bike.
- ?? If you ride a school bus, learn and practice the safety rules for waiting at the bus stop, getting on and off the bus, and riding the bus, paying particular attention to the "danger zone" immediately surrounding the bus. This area extends ten feet in front of the bus, ten feet on each side of the bus and ten feet behind the bus and is where children are at greatest risk of not being seen by the bus driver.
- ?? If you walk to school, learn and practice the safety rules for pedestrians. Always cross at cross walks and obey all traffic signs, traffic lights and crossing guard instructions
- ?? Be a good role model for your younger brothers and sisters and friends, and help them learn and practice the safety rules.

Tips for Parents/Educators

- ?? Help your children/students learn and practice the safety rules for walking, bicycling or riding in a passenger car, school bus or transit bus.
- ?? Supervise young children as they are walking or biking to school or as they wait at the school bus stop.
- ?? Be a good role model, especially when you are with your kids/students. Always buckle up in the car, always wear a helmet when biking, and always follow pedestrian safety rules.
- ?? Support any "Getting to School Safely" activities sponsored by your school, the PTA/PTO or other community organizations.

- ?? If your teen has just obtained a driver license, don't allow them to carry any teen or children passengers, play music or eat in the car for the first six months they are driving, and conversely, don't let your teen or child ride with a teen driver until the teen has obtained at least six months' or more driving experience.

Tips for Motorists

- ?? Slow down and obey all traffic laws and speed limits.
- ?? Always stop for a school bus that has stopped to load or unload passengers. Red flashing lights and an extended stop arm tell you the school bus is stopped to load or unload children. It's the law. (See MCA 61-8-351).
- ?? Be alert and ready to stop. Watch for children walking in the street, especially where there are no sidewalks. Watch for children playing and gathering near bus stops. Watch for children arriving late for the bus who may dart into the street without looking for traffic. When backing out of a driveway or leaving a garage, watch for children walking or biking to school.
- ?? When driving in neighborhoods or school zones, watch for young people who may be in a hurry to get to school and may not be thinking about getting there safely.

And there's one thing more. Even though fall is upon us, MDT still has 70 construction projects going on statewide, which means that motorists will be traveling through work zones for the foreseeable future. If you look at the statistics on work zone accidents, the numbers are staggering: 1,079 people died in work zone crashes in the United States in 2001, six of them in Montana. What's more, four out of five killed were motorists. If I could leave you with one additional tip, then, it would be that we all need to do our part to make work zones safer, whether that be wearing appropriate safety gear when out on a site or obeying flaggers and reduced speed limit signs when traveling through a project. By driving slow and thinking fast, we can help prevent accidents and make our roads a safer place. That, after all, is key to staying "on track" with MDT.

Dave Galt
Director